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Crane, Paula

From: Albano, Sandra
Sent: Tuesday, September 22, 2015 9:59 AM
To: Crane, Paula
Subject: FW: support 80% of CPA funds for affordable housing

FYI

From: Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli [mailto:pizzazeoli194@msn.com]
Sent: Monday, September 21, 2015 1:04 AM
To: City Council <CityCouncil@CambridgeMA.GOV>
Subject: support 80% of CPA funds for affordable housing

21 September, 2015

To the Honorable Members of the Cambridge City Council,

I am writing you to express my strong support for the City Council voting to commit 80% of Community Preservation Act FY 2016 funds to affordable housing.

Cambridge is in the midst of a housing emergency. This past June, the Harding Street tenants became the face of the city's affordable housing crisis when the apartment buildings where they have lived for years (a total of 195 years for the 10 affected households) were sold, and the new owner tried to impose monthly rent increases to the tune of \$1,000, \$1,300, and \$2,300 by harassing tenants and threatening them with eviction.

The situation of the Harding Street tenants caused the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) to rethink its emergency criteria. In 2013, CHA got rid of emergency status categories for medical conditions and rent increases that resulted in high shelter burdens. CHA will now offer income eligible tenants who are at risk of displacement due to significant rent increases "in place" vouchers so they can remain in their homes and in their neighborhood. The catch is that the owner has to be willing to accept the voucher. In the case of this particular owner, he feels that he would be the one subsidizing tenants by agreeing to charge them below market rent (anything less than \$2,200), and that CHA would be forcing him to become a "slumlord" if he accepted a voucher that didn't get him any more money but would cost him more to improve standards.

The CHA's current voucher payment standard for a two bedroom apartment at 125% of fair market rent (FMR) is \$1,867. The median market asking rent for a two bedroom apartment in Cambridge is \$2,950. Given local conditions, CHA is willing to be flexible with its payment standards for multiple year contracts. For example, CHA would approve a payment standard of 135% of FMR, or \$2,016, for a two bedroom apartment, for contracts of two or more years. The problem is how far the Cambridge market has moved from affordability. In other words, how many owners want to take what CHA will pay? It is worth pointing out that back in 2004, 94% of CHA tenant-based Housing Choice Voucher participant households lived in Cambridge. By 2012, it had decreased to 68%. **Today, it's 50%.** That means half of the "lucky few" who receive a CHA tenant-based voucher have to move out of Cambridge to be able to use their voucher.

I recently came across a news headline, "San Diego City Council declares affordable housing emergency for twelfth year in a row." I'm all in favor of calling what's happening in the Cambridge rental market an affordable housing emergency if it means that we act like it's an emergency. The Harding Street tenants should

have made everyone who is listening aware of what is at stake if we don't come up with policies that will prevent the displacement of individual community members (for example, the right of first refusal to buy rental housing). We lose neighborhoods. We lose community. We lose ourselves.

Lastly, the Community Development Department's memo regarding Council Order #0-9 (dated January 5, 2015) on the "feasibility of having the City commit to constructing 1,000 new affordable units in the City by the end of this decade" states that it is a "*primary goal* for the next five years (emphasis mine)" to preserve the long-term affordability of Fresh Pond Apartments and the Close Building. Preservation has become more expensive in Cambridge, particularly, since regulatory changes were made to state law 40T. We will not be able to save the city's existing affordable stock (never mind create hundreds of new units) without the continued commitment of 80% of CPA funds for affordable housing.

Sincerely yours,

Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli
Alliance of Cambridge Tenants Voucher Co-Chair
Member of the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust